

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL  
Fall, 2013

# Social Theory

(SOCI 700)

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Tuesday/Thursday, 11:00–12:15    Hamilton 151

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

### *Course Goals*

1. To acquaint students with the idea of sociological *paradigms* and the tools for understanding and evaluating specific paradigms;
2. To introduce students to the “sociological canon” of major works in sociological theory;
3. To introduce students to the form, content, and practice of current debates in sociological theory;
4. To demonstrate the importance of sociological theory as a part of sociological research and practice; and
5. To consider critically the possibilities for empirical application and testing of social theory.

### *Requirements*

1. Attendance and active participation in class discussions
2. Two team-based presentations of readings and discussion leadership
3. An in-depth writing project; select either:
  - Three short, critical essays, each considering the work of one theorist; or
  - One final paper considering at least two theorists and contributing an original comparative, synthetic, or applied argument relevant to some sociological concern.

The final paper is due in class on December 3.

### *Team Presentations*

A team of students will be responsible for organizing the discussion of readings during each class session. These students, working together, are responsible for:

- Preparing a “seminar paper,” to be distributed via <http://sakai.unc.edu> to the rest of the class no later than 12:00 noon the day before class; and
- Organizing and directing class discussion of the readings for the class.

The seminar paper need not be a polished product; it should raise ideas, issues, concerns, and opportunities presented by the readings, and thereby form a provocative basis for the class discussion. The seminar paper should *not* be primarily a summary, nor primarily a list of discussion questions. It may be particularly helpful to focus our attention on particular pieces of the reading worth discussing in class.

### *Grading Policy*

The main principle is this: *Nobody sees, or cares about, your grades in graduate classes.*

For the qualitatively inclined, the grading policy is essentially this: students who excel *both* in classroom elements of the course (e.g., seminar papers, presentations, discussion) *and* in the writing project will receive **H** grades. This is unlikely to be more than 2 or 3 students in a class, although it can of course vary. Students who excel in one or the other, but not both, will receive grades in the **P+** to **H-** range. The vast majority of students will receive a **P**, which represents substantive mastery, at a Ph.D. level, of sociological theory—a significant accomplishment.

For the quantitatively inclined, think in these terms:

Assignment	Grade percentage
Attendance & Participation	30%
Team presentations	20%
Final Paper	50%

## READINGS AND RESOURCES

Most required readings that are not in the books listed below are available for download from the course readings site, <http://perrin.socsci.unc.edu/readings>, or from <http://sakai.unc.edu>. You will need a username and password to access this site; these will be provided in class.

The recommended readings listed under many class sessions are suggestions for further reading in the field. Students presenting on those dates, and those with particular interests in the areas, may find them useful. You are *not* required or expected to read them for the class.

### *Required Books*

**Pierre Bourdieu.** *Practical Reason* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

**Émile Durkheim (trans. Fields).** *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1995).

**Émile Durkheim.** *Suicide* (Penguin Classics, 2007).

**Michel Foucault.** *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (Vintage, 1978).

**Sara Shostak.** *Exposed Science: Genes, the Environment, and the Politics of Population Health* (University of California Press, 2013).

**Max Weber, ed. Stephen Kalberg.** *Readings and Commentary on Modernity* (Blackwell, 2005).

### *Recommended Book*

All of the necessary material for our study of Marx is available from the <http://www.marxists.org> website. However, you may find it useful to have the definitive selection in your library for this and future classes.

**Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels (ed. Tucker).** *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd ed.* (W. W. Norton, 1978).

### *Textbooks*

I have not assigned a textbook for this course; take your pick of one or more of these six if you would like a convenient reference.

**Lewis Coser.** *Masters of Sociological Thought* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).

**Craig Calhoun, et al.** *Classical Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).

**Craig Calhoun, et al.** *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Blackwell, 2002).

**George Ritzer.** *Sociological Theory* (McGraw-Hill, 1996).

**Jonathan Turner.** *The Structure of Sociological Theory, 6th ed.* (Wadsworth, 1998).

**Malcolm Waters.** *Modern Sociological Theory* (Sage, 1994).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**August 20** Introduction and course organization

- Why theory? Introductions and substantive basis of the class
- Organization of presentation dates

**August 22** Preliminary challenges

- Theodor W. Adorno, "Introduction" to *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* [WWW](#)
- Karl R. Popper, "The Logic of the Social Sciences," in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* [WWW](#)
- Richard Ned Lebow, "If Mozart had Died at Your Age: Psychologic Versus Statistical Inference." *Political Psychology* Volume 27 Issue 2, Pages 157 - 172. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118627944/abstract>

**August 27** Durkheim

- *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Translator's Introduction; Introduction; Book I, Chapter 1; Book II, Chapter 1
- **Optional:** Read the blog thread beginning at <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2011/06/06/sociologists-behaving-badly/>, continuing at <http://scatter.wordpress.com/2011/06/07/on-the-value-of-religious-experience-to-sociology/>, and culminating with Kieran Healy's very insightful comments at <http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2011/06/08/durkheim-and-religious-experi>

**August 29** Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Book II, Chapter 8; Book III, Chapter 5; Conclusion

**September 3** Durkheim, *Suicide*, Introduction; Book Two, Chapters 1 and 5; Book Three, entire.

**September 5** Class Cancelled: Rosh Hashanah

**September 10** Marx: The Philosophical Roots

- Excerpts from "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844": pp. 70–81, 93–105.
- "Theses on Feuerbach": pp. 143–145.
- "The German Ideology: Part I," excerpts: pp. 146–175.

**September 12** Marx: The Critique of Capitalism

- *Capital*, vol. I, Book I, Part I, Chapters I (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>) and II (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch02.htm>)

**September 17** Marx: The Critique of Capitalism

- *Capital*, vol. I, Part II:
  - <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch04.htm>

- <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch05.htm>
- <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch06.htm>
- Part VII, Chapter XXV (<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm>)
- **Recommended:** Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

#### September 19 Post-Marxism

- Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.
- Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule,” *Socialist Revolution* 33 (May-June, 1977). WWW
- **Recommended:** Pakulski, Jan and Malcolm Waters. 1996. “The Reshaping and Dissolution of Social Class in Advanced Society.” *Theory and Society* 25:667-91. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/w08200311462301g/>
- **Recommended:** Szelényi, Szonja, and Jacqueline Olvera. “The Declining Significance of Class: Does Gender Complicate the Story?” *Theory & Society* 25:5, 725–730. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q46h373p765g41w7/>
- **Recommended:** Wright, Erik Olin. 1996. “The Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis.” *Theory and Society* 25:693-716.

#### September 24 du Bois: Race and American Society

- “Of the Dawn of Freedom.” <http://www.bartleby.com/114/2.html>
- Selections from *The Philadelphia Negro: Chapters I, II, and XVIII*. <http://archive.org/details/philadelphianegr001901mbp>
- Lynn England and W. Keith Warner. “W. E. B. Du Bois: Reform, Will, and the Veil.” *Social Forces* (2013) 91 (3): 955-973 (<http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/91/3/955.abstract>)

#### September 26 du Bois: Race and American Society II

- “The Souls of White Folks.” [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15210/15210-h/15210-h.htm#Chapter\\_II](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15210/15210-h/15210-h.htm#Chapter_II)
- “The Conservation of Races.” <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31254/31254-h/31254-h.htm>
- Karen Fields, “Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation Between W.E.B. Du Bois and Emile Durkheim.” *Theory and Society* 31:4 (August, 2002), 435–462. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1020900208865>
- **Recommended:** Lynn England and W. Keith Warner. “W. E. B. Du Bois: Reform, Will, and the Veil.” *Social Forces* (2013) 91 (3): 955-973 (<http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/91/3/955.abstract>)

#### October 1 Weber: Groups and Identification

- “Class, Status, Party,” pp. 151–162 in Kalberg
- Comment on Ploetz, “The Concepts of Race and Society,” pp. 306–314 in Kalberg
- “When and Why do People Obey?” pp. 179–193 in Kalberg
- “The Technical Superiority of Bureaucratic Organization over Administration by Notables.” pp. 198–201 in Kalberg
- “Leveling and ‘Passive’ Democratization.” pp. 209–216 in Kalberg

#### October 3 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Selections. pp. 75–107 in Kalberg.

#### October 8 Contemporary Ripples of Weber.

- Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell. “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, April, 1983, pages 147-160. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095101>

- Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *ASR* 51(April 1986): 273-286 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095521>

**October 10** Bourdieu I.

- “The Logic of Fields” and “Interest, Habitus, Rationality,” from Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) [WWW](#)
- From *Logic of Practice*, pp. 52–65. [WWW](#)

**October 15** Bourdieu, Chapters 1 and 4 in *Practical Reason*

**October 17 Fall Break** – no class

**October 22** Foucault

- *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, Parts I and II
- “What is Enlightenment?” <http://foucault.info/documents/whatIsEnlightenment/foucault.whatIsEnlightenment.en.html>

**October 24** Foucault

- *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, Parts IV and V

**October 29 Class Cancelled**

**October 31** Foucault.

- “Questions of Method” and “Governmentality,” from *The Foucault Effect* [WWW](#)
- **Recommended:** Michael Power, “Foucault and Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011), 35–56. <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150133>

**November 5** Structure and Agency.

- Ann Mische and Mustafa Emirbayer. “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998). (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782934>)
- William H. Sewell, Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.” *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992). (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781191>);
- Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” (<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>)

**November 7** Contemporary Pragmatism.

- Gross, Neil. “A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms.” *American Sociological Review* 74:3 (June, 2009): 358–379. <http://asr.sagepub.com/content/74/3/358.abstract>
- Silver, Daniel. “The Moodiness of Action.” *Sociological Theory* 29:3, 199–222. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01394.x/abstract>

**November 12** Contemporary Applications in Science and Knowledge.

- Frye, Margaret. “Bright Futures in Malawi’s New Dawn: Educational Aspirations as Assertions of Identity.” *American Journal of Sociology* 117:6 (May, 2012): 1565–1624.
- Perrin, Andrew J., and Hedwig Lee. “The Undertheorized Environment: Sociological Theory and the Ontology of Behavioral Genetics.” *Sociological Perspectives* 50:2 (Summer, 2007), 303–322. <http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/sop.2007.50.2.303>

**November 14** Method and Event

- Andrew Abbott, “Transcending General Linear Reality.” *Sociological Theory* 6:2 (Autumn, 1988): 169–186. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/202114>
- John Levi Martin, “What is Field Theory?” *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (2003), 1–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/375201>

**November 19** Shostak, *Exposed Science*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5

**November 21** Shostak, *Exposed Science*, Chapters 6 and Conclusion

*Prof. Shostak will join the second half of class via Skype for a conversation.*

**November 26** Contemporary Challenges.

- Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo. "Constructing a Market, Performing Theory: The Historical Sociology of a Financial Derivatives Exchange." *American Journal of Sociology* 109:1, ( Jul2003). p107, 39p. <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/374404>
- Downer, John. "737-Cabriolet: The Limits of Knowledge and the Sociology of Inevitable Failure." *American Journal of Sociology* 117:3 (November, 2011): 725–762.

**November 28 Thanksgiving** – No class

**December 3** (Tentative) conclusions: using and making theory as a sociologist

**Final Papers Due in class**

## WHAT'S MISSING?

It is simply impossible even to touch upon all the subfields of sociological theory in a one-semester class. Given that constraint, there are lots of important pieces of sociological theory that are missing from our semester's overview. I will be happy to discuss these with you, informally or formally, as any of them may turn out to be useful and/or interesting to you.

**Missing classics.** Additional Durkheim classics like *The Division of Labor in Society* are left out in favor of the, in my opinion, much more interesting argument to be found in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Also missing is the foundational work of Georg Simmel, August Comte, Gabriel Tarde, and Alexis de Tocqueville.

**Older American sociology.** Early American theorists such as Cooley, Mead, Dewey, Mills, Park, and Hughes are, sadly, neglected in favor of their more famous European contemporaries. American sociology was dominated between roughly 1935 and 1975 by the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons and the critiques thereof. These critiques were both relatively friendly in nature (e.g., by Robert K. Merton) and relatively hostile (e.g., Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman). These debates are very interesting historically, and genealogically they are crucial to the development of our discipline. You may find Lewis A. Coser's article, "Sociological Theory From the Chicago Dominance to 1965," *Annual Review of Sociology* 2(1976), helpful.

**Frankfurt School and Post-Frankfurt critical theory.** Probably the most interesting, and frustrating, strain of postwar theory emerged from the exile intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, particularly Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Recent echoes include the very influential sociologist/philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who was trained at and influenced by the Frankfurt School. The most important additional strains are post-colonial theory and contemporary feminist theory, each of which could easily be taught for a semester or more. My SOCI 800 (Advanced Sociological Theory) class in Spring, 2014, will cover much of this area.

**Recent French repertoire theory.** There is very interesting work by scholars associated with Laurent Thevenot and Luc Boltanski on the modes of thought and justification and how to measure them.

**Actor-Network Theory.** Some people love it, some people hate it. Associated with Bruno Latour and his students, and in many ways foundational to what we've read on science and performativity, this strain of work is a kind of radical pragmatism that has been either very productive or very distracting, depending on whom you ask!

**Normative theory.** Mostly found within our sister discipline, political science, there is a flourishing subfield of democratic theory whose aim is to discuss what constitutes a good society, a good polity, etc.

**Theory-of.** Any sociological study worth the paper it's written on contains theory: a theory of entrepreneurship, of health effects, of political participation.